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Central Intelligence Agency



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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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China and Nuclear Arms Control: Evolving Policies

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Summary

Beijing's effort to soften its reputation as an opponent of international safeguards and US-Soviet arms accords has intensified as the Chinese have felt threatened by the rapid growth of both US and Soviet military capabilities in East Asia. The Chinese also want to enhance China's international respectability, especially among Third World countries. As part of this effort, China has joined the IAEA, disavowed nuclear proliferation, participated in UN disarmament forums, and counseled US-Soviet arms restraint. At bottom, however, Chinese goals--determined by Beijing's relative weakness compared with the United States and the USSR--remain unchanged:

- To maintain a free hand to expand China's nuclear weapons capabilities;
- To exercise some influence on US-Soviet arms talks, especially when these negotiations might affect East Asia;

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This memorandum was prepared by [ ] China Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, OEA/China Division, [ ]

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-- To promote China as a spokesman of international, especially Third World, disarmament concerns. [REDACTED]

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Because of a fear that its relative weakness would give it little leverage in any talks, and could result in limiting China's own strategic options, we believe Beijing will be wary of direct involvement in arms control efforts sponsored by the United States or the USSR. Chinese policy is still evolving, and its rhetorical opposition to the arms race is sometimes contradicted privately. [REDACTED]

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### The Background

Beginning in the late 1950s, Beijing criticized most arms control negotiations as designed to maintain the superpowers' nuclear arms "monopoly." As China emerged from its isolation during the 1970s, Beijing believed it was confronted with the possibility that US-USSR detente would lead to a deal being struck between Moscow and Washington that would perpetuate China's inferior position. China was sharply critical of the SALT negotiations, for example, accusing the United States of attempting to "appease" the Soviets in order to divert the Soviet threat toward China. [REDACTED]

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During the late 1970s, China became even more concerned about Moscow's "unbridled" arms buildup, especially in Asia, claiming it threatened world peace and presented China with the problem of dealing alone with the USSR--which it believed constituted its major security threat. Beijing thus called for a global "united front" against the Soviet Union, and moved closer to the United States and the West. [REDACTED]

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### Recent Views

In response to the US decision to modernize its nuclear (and other) forces, China during the past two years has appeared less concerned that Soviet expansion will remain unchecked. The major threat to world peace now, says Beijing, is the arms race between the two superpowers. Thus, Chinese media persistently highlight the dangers of the buildup by both the United States and the USSR, and most significantly, have backed away from their earlier criticisms of arms reduction negotiations. [REDACTED]

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We believe that Beijing is sincerely concerned that the arms race is entering a new stage of nuclear deployments that will leave China militarily farther behind the United States and the USSR. In addition, the Chinese may fear that a renewed arms race will lead to greater bipolarity in world politics, making it more difficult for China to steer an "independent" foreign policy course acceptable to the Third World. [REDACTED]

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These concerns led China, in August 1982, to offer Beijing's own proposal for global disarmament at the UN. As revised by current Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian at the UN in September 1983, the Chinese proposal calls for the two superpowers to stop all testing, research and manufacturing of new nuclear weapons, and to agree to cut their stockpiles by half. Once the latter pledge has been made, Beijing would declare its willingness to attend a world disarmament conference. [REDACTED]

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We do not believe that China expects that its proposals will win approval, and both the disarmament scheme and the criticisms of the US-USSR nuclear arms deployments are aimed in large measure at international disarmament advocates. Chinese media have strongly supported the European peace movement, which Beijing refers to as a genuine mass movement desirous of disarmament and world peace. [REDACTED]

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At the same time, however, Chinese officials have told West European and US officials privately that they support NATO missile deployments against the USSR, despite their public protests to the contrary. For example, in a discussion with a group of former government officials and academics just prior to President Reagan's trip to China, Premier Zhao said that Beijing understood the US need to respond to the Soviet arms buildup. Zhao went on, however, to raise his concern--voiced frequently to similar visitors--that the US response might trigger an arms race that would ultimately lead to reduced European support for US policies, and possibly even lead to a split between NATO and the United States. [REDACTED]

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### Regional Concerns

In East Asia, where the threat posed by the Soviet buildup--both nuclear and conventional--is more immediate, Beijing's response has relied on improving ties with Washington and Tokyo, while using negotiations with Moscow as a means to reduce tensions and buy the time necessary for economic modernization. Thus, the Chinese have relied on more than just rhetoric, although their actions in the region are sometimes at odds with their public position. Nonetheless, the Soviet buildup means that the qualitative gap between Chinese and Soviet forces continues to widen. [REDACTED]

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When it appeared that the US-USSR negotiations in Geneva might result in the transfer of additional SS-20s to the Soviet Far East, Beijing tried to position itself at the head of East Asian opposition, both publicly and privately. China raised the possible transfer directly with the Soviets during their bilateral talks, thus creating a new obstacle to significantly improved Sino-Soviet ties. [REDACTED]

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[redacted] This was the first time that China had stated its position within the context of US-Soviet arms control negotiations. Beijing upgraded its representation in Geneva to ambassadorial status late last year. [redacted]

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Implications

Despite these moves, we do not believe that China is prepared to participate directly in US-USSR negotiations. China has participated in source multi-lateral discussions, such as those at the UN. Beijing reacted coolly, however, to Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau's 1983 proposal for 5-Power talks stating that the superpowers must take the lead. The Chinese are wary of both US and Soviet intentions, and are particularly doubtful that meaningful disarmament can be achieved soon. Thus, Beijing will probably continue its public criticism of the arms race while being privately supportive of US and other Western efforts to respond to the Soviet buildup. [redacted]

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SUBJECT: China and Nuclear Arms Control: Evolving Policies

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